

# More Budget Woes For The County

## **Vacation plan could cost millions the county may struggle to find**

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<http://www.thesentinel.com/mont/vacation-budget>

A budget plan to grant nearly 9,000 Montgomery County employees more vacation time per County Executive Isiah "Ike" Leggett's (D) request could cost more than \$7 million, according to a new report released from the Office of Legislative Oversight. This news comes in stark contradiction with Leggett's announcement that the move would cost the county nothing.

"That report calculated the economic value of hours, not the cost," said Leggett's spokesman Patrick Leggett when asked about initial accounts from Leggett that the move would cost nothing. The move is part of a proposed spending policy from Leggett that purports it would double the county's reserve fund over the next five years. That reserve fund represents about 5 percent of the county's \$3.5 billion general fund for unforeseen issues, such as extreme weather. The county council voted in May to increase the reserve fund to 6 percent, citing that the reserve fund had been actually used for operating costs during 2009 and 2010. Leggett's policy would also prevent one-time revenues from being used to fund recurring items.

The \$7 million is attributed to the cost of lost work time and leave days concentrated mostly within the police and fire departments-48 additional hours off for firefighters and 26 for police and general government employees, according to the report. The work hours lost under the plan would total nearly 250,000 hours or the equivalent of about 120 employees annually, if government workers used all their leave time. According to the report, the International Association of Fire Fighters would cost \$1.5 million, the Fraternal Order of Police would cost \$750,000, and Government Employees Organization would cost \$6.93 million.

When asked if the paid vacation leave had anything to do with the major cuts some unions were being asked to take in the fiscal 2011 budget plan, like the police and firefighter's, Lacefield said, "That's not what this is about, we're looking out for what's best for the county."

The county council, which has pushed for a separate plan does not appear to be on board with Leggett.

"We have asked a lot of our county taxpayers," said Council President Nancy Floreen (D-At large). "How are we supposed to afford this?" Floreen's major concern was how to ask residents to pay roughly \$250 more in taxes this year, while giving union employees more time off. One new tax in those added costs per taxpayer is the Energy Tax. The council voted for that tax in May. It asks county residents to pay for energy costs like cell phones.

But despite the council's outspoken disapproval of the plan, the council won't get the chance to sign off on it.

"This decision on its own doesn't require their approval," Lacefield said.

The plan was first publically introduced on June 17 when Leggett met with the council, the Office of Legislative Oversight and the office's director, Karen Orlansky.

"It's no mystery that we are looking at the fundamental size of the workforce and the cost per county employee right now," Orlansky said. She said the county primarily spends on employee salary and benefits.

A council committee meeting to discuss union arrangements was cancelled Monday when Councilwoman Duchy Tractenberg (D-At large) announced they would wait to make decisions until they receive a report from the county's attorney on a "difference of opinion about what the council needs to act on.